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Analytic-linguistic approach on enhancing English language pronunciation among junior high school students

Enfoque analítico-lingüístico para mejorar la pronunciación del idioma inglés en estudiantes de educación secundaria

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Darío Josué Maldonado Juca [1], **Miriam Eucevia Troya Sánchez** [2]

[1] Universidad Nacional de Loja, dario.j.maldonado.j@unl.edu.ec. Loja, Ecuador.
[2] Universidad Nacional de Loja, miriam.troya@unl.edu.ec. Loja, Ecuador.

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Resumen

La pronunciación del inglés desempeña un papel fundamental en la adquisición del idioma. Puede resultar bastante exigente para hablantes no nativos de inglés en Ecuador debido a la escasez de recursos dentro del sistema educativo. Este proyecto de investigación tuvo como objetivo mejorar las habilidades de pronunciación en inglés de estudiantes de colegio de una institución educativa privada de Cuenca, Ecuador, mediante el uso del enfoque analítico-lingüístico. El estudio siguió un modelo de investigación-acción durante cinco semanas e incluyó evaluaciones de pretest y postest. Los participantes tuvieron sesiones de aprendizaje centradas en dificultades de pronunciación como los sonidos vocálicos (/ɪ/, /iː/), los grupos consonánticos que comienzan con /s/, así como patrones de acentuación y entonación. Los resultados mostraron una mejora en la pronunciación, ya que el promedio de calificaciones aumentó de 5,47 en la evaluación inicial a 9,04 después de la intervención. El estudio concluyó que el enfoque analítico-lingüístico proporciona una estructura eficaz para mejorar las habilidades de pronunciación. Sin embargo, se requieren investigaciones adicionales para evaluar sus efectos a largo plazo y su utilidad en otros contextos.

Palabras clave: desafíos de pronunciación; entrenamiento articulatorio; instrucción explícita; pares mínimos; transcripción fonética.

Abstract

English pronunciation plays a critical role in language acquisition. It can be quite demanding for non-native English speakers in Ecuador due to scarce pronunciation resources in its educational system. This research project aimed to enhance the English pronunciation skills of high school students attending a private school in Cuenca, Ecuador, by using the analytic-linguistic approach. The study followed an action research model spanning five weeks and included both pre and post-test assessments. Participants took part in learning sessions aimed at tackling pronunciation challenges such as vowel sounds (/ɪ/, /iː/), clusters starting with /s/, and stress and intonation patterns. The results showed enhanced pronunciation skills as the average score increased from 5;47 during the assessment to 9;04 after the sessions. The study concluded that the analytic approach offers a structure for improving pronunciation skills. However, further research is necessary to assess its lasting effects and wider usefulness.

Keywords: pronunciation challenges; articulatory training; explicit instruction; minimal pairs; phonetic transcription.

1. Introducción

For junior high school students in Cuenca, Ecuador, ideal English pronunciation involves speaking clearly, accurately producing each syllable, and speaking fluently. However, achieving this level of proficiency poses considerable challenges. English learners often struggle with sounds that do not exist in their native language, which affects their ability to distinguish certain vowel sounds, such

as /ɪ/ and /i:/ (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Furthermore, managing stress and intonation patterns remains a common struggle, as these elements are crucial for conveying meaning and emotion in spoken English (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992). Pronunciation problems in these domains can obstruct students' speech in terms of intelligibility, but they can also inhibit the students' willingness to use oral language if they fear that they will be misunderstood because of their errors (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Despite the need for precise English pronunciation, several obstacles prevent students from achieving it. Pronunciation is often neglected in English curricula, with more focus on grammar and vocabulary. Additionally, non-native speakers struggle with sounds such as /ɪ/ and /i:/ and with initial consonant clusters (Calvo Benzies, 2013; Swan & Smith, 2001), a challenge compounded by limited exposure to native-like pronunciation models needed to master intonation and stress. This creates a gap between students' current abilities and the desired level of proficiency.

Thus, this research seeks to improve the pronunciation of junior high school students in the city of Cuenca through an analytic-linguistic approach as an alternative to current teaching methodologies, since the institution could adopt a systematic form of teaching to resolve pronunciation issues that would not otherwise be achieved. The study examines the effects of the approach in the hope of benefiting accurate, intelligible pronunciation.

The independent variable of this study was the analytic-linguistic approach, which encompasses explicit pronunciation instruction, articulatory explanations, phonetic transcription activities, minimal-pair practice, and exercises focused on stress and intonation. The dependent variable was English pronunciation, which was studied and analyzed through students' performance in vowel discrimination and production, consonant cluster recognition and production, and the use of suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation patterns.

The research questions for this study are: (1) What is the level of English pronunciation among junior high school students before the implementation of the analytic-linguistic approach? (2) What is the level of English pronunciation among junior high school students after the implementation of the analytic-linguistic approach? (3) Is there a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test English pronunciation scores of junior high school students following the implementation of the analytic-linguistic approach?

2. Methodology

Research design

This study followed the action research model and its four steps, planning, taking action, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), and it employed a quantitative approach to gather data from tests.

Research Settings and Participants

This project was conducted during the 2024-2025 school year at a private institution located in Cuenca, Ecuador. The participants encompassed 26 students, divided into 12 males and 13 females. The sampling group was selected by using

the purposive sampling technique, which has been defined by Etikan et al. (2016) as "the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses" (p. 2). These students were aged between 15 and 16 years old with a B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. On the grounds of their age, an official document was created and sent to their legal representatives to authorize the researcher to apply and document the different proposed activities with them.

Research Approach

This research used a quantitative approach to give answers to the proposed research questions. This approach was appropriate for the study, as it allowed space for the entire analysis of how the analytic-linguistic approach improves students' pronunciation in junior high school. Quantitative data were measured through a pretest and posttest. These data provided solid evidence of progress and deeper insights into factors that influence it. This helped ensure that the findings become statistically important as well as contextually meaningful for making an informed conclusion and some practical recommendations. In this regard, the quantitative nature of the research design would provide precise evidence for the amount of change in pronunciation accuracy and provide a solid basis to make conclusions in terms of teaching interventions (Mackey & Gass, 2015).

Data collection techniques

In this study, the testing technique with pretest and posttest as the instruments was used to gather quantitative data. This technique provides measurable data on student learning and makes it easier to identify gaps in knowledge (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

The pretest consisted of five items in total. The first one was a listening exercise to differentiate the sounds /ɪ/ and /i:/. The second one involved a listening exercise to recognize the correct articulation of consonant clusters beginning with the /s/ sound (/st/, /sk/, /sm/, /sp/, /sn/). The third item was an exercise to articulate the /ɪ/ and /i:/ sounds correctly according to the combinations of letters in which those sounds occur. The fourth item was an exercise to articulate consonant clusters beginning with the /s/ sound (/st/, /sk/, /sm/, /sp/, /sn/) appropriately. Finally, the fifth item encompassed 5 sentences that included a combination of the /ɪ/ and /i:/ sounds, consonant clusters beginning with the /s/ sound, and stress and intonation patterns. The participants were asked to read the sentences in order to evaluate how they pronounced the aforementioned sounds and whether they used proper stress and intonation when uttering the sentences. The posttest contained exactly the same exercises described above, which was used to analyze whether the students improved their overall pronunciation after receiving explicit instruction with the analytic-linguistic approach.

The instrument described above was validated by means of two approaches: construct validity and content validity. The former, also referred to as theory validity, is considered an approach to validate theoretical characteristics that cannot be explicitly defined in terms of a criterion (Colliver et al., 2012), which means that relevant and academic theory was used to support and justify the content of the test

and questionnaire. In this case, authors such as Blevins (1998); Celce-Murcia et al. (2010); and Enciso, et al. (2019) were used to validate the theory since they provided basic foundations to support the content of the tests. The second approach was determined by expert judgment, and it involved experts in the topic of the test reviewing it and judging its content to ensure it is valid (Gay et al., 2012). The construct validity of the pretest and posttest was evaluated using Aiken's V test, yielding a score of 1.23 out of a maximum of 1.25. This result indicated a high degree of agreement among experts regarding the relevance and representativeness of the items, suggesting that the instrument effectively measured the intended construct. Finally, the pretest and post-test were piloted with 5 students randomly selected from the population in order to identify any potential issues with the instrument before its application, which provided significant insights so as to make the necessary adjustments to the test if pertinent. Data analysis

The pretest and post-test scores were quantitatively analyzed using a variety of statistical methods to determine if there were significant improvements in pronunciation among the participants. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of the data, such as the mean and standard deviation of the scores, in order to provide insight into the variability or dispersion of data around the mean. Next, the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was applied to assess whether the data followed a normal distribution, as this would influence the choice of statistical tests. Since the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the data did meet the normality assumption, a paired t-test was chosen. These analyses were conducted using Jamovi software, allowing the researcher to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in pronunciation improvement after the intervention.

Intervention proposal

Timing

The intervention plan took five weeks during the 2024-2025 academic year to complete. During this period, explicit instruction through the analytic-linguistic approach was employed through a variety of activities that focused on articulatory descriptions, phonetic training, minimal pairs, and stress and intonation patterns.

Sessions

The lessons designed incorporated the analytic-linguistic approach to facilitate proper acquisition of pronunciation. They followed the PPP model with its three stages, Presentation, Practice, and Production.

The first week was used for the pretest and after that, the researcher presented the vowel sounds /ɪ/ and /i:/ by means of their IPA symbols and explained how to articulate them by focusing on the position of the lips (relaxed for /ɪ/ and spread for /i:/) and the dropping of the jaw (mid-close for /ɪ/ and close for /i:/). Then, the participants were shown examples of words that contain the target vowel sounds and worked on some exercises to practice them, such as classifying the sounds, using phonetic transcriptions to pronounce words with the sounds, and drilling minimal pairs to understand the key differences between the vowel sounds. Finally, the participants were asked to

read aloud sentences that contained the sounds in order to accurately articulate them.

In the second week, the researcher presented the target sound /s/ and explained how it is articulated, focusing on the fact that this sound is voiceless and produced at the alveolar ridge. To explain this last aspect, the researcher used a mouth diagram so that the participants could visualize where the sound is produced. After this explanation, students were told that when this sound is followed by a consonant, Spanish speakers tend to mistakenly add the /ə/ sound at the beginning, which is considered incorrect pronunciation. It was added that this is also done across word boundaries when a word ends in /s/ and the next word begins with an /s/ consonant cluster, such as "bus station." To practice this aspect, learners were given exercises in which they classified and transcribed words beginning with /s/ consonant clusters such as "skip", "snow", "smart", "sport", and "strange". They also practiced pronouncing cognates in English and Spanish, such as "estrella", and "star". This was done to make students realize that even though Spanish adds an extra sound at the beginning of a cluster, English does not. Lastly, the participants practiced reading sentences that included the target consonant clusters in individual words and across word boundaries, placing special emphasis on the latter issue.

In the third week, the researcher presented some rules related to stress, such as two-syllable verbs and adjectives, adjectives with the suffixes -ous and -ent, and three-syllable verbs ending in -ate. The participants then practiced this by identifying stressed syllables in words such as "pretty," "proficient," "imitate," and "commit." Then, the words were classified according to their stress pattern. Finally, the participants read aloud sentences with the words previously practiced.

In the fourth week, the researcher introduced intonation patterns, focusing on situations in which each is used, such as rising intonation in yes/no questions, lists, and unfinished thoughts and falling intonation in complete statements, wh-questions, and commands. This was visually supported by arrows that represented each pattern. Then, the participants were shown some utterances and were asked to identify whether they should be uttered with rising or falling intonation. In addition to this, the participants were asked to draw the correct intonation pattern above each utterance. Finally, the participants read a paragraph that contained a combination of all the utterances aforementioned and were expected to use the intonation patterns properly.

In the last week, a review of all four aspects was conducted. This was done by means of reading paragraphs that contained all the aspects, such as the /ɪ/ and /i:/ sounds, consonant clusters beginning with /s/, stress and intonation. After this process, the post-test was administered to the participants.

3. Results

Pretest and post-test

Table 1. Pretest. Descriptive measures for pronunciation skills

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
1. Listening: /ɪ/ & /i:/ (1.25 pts)	26	0.76	0.35	0.25	1.25
1. Listening: /s/ (1.25 pts)	26	0.64	0.21	0.25	1.00
1. Reading: /ɪ/ and /i:/ (1.25 pts)	26	0.68	0.20	0.35	1.05
1. Reading: /s/ (1.25 pts)	26	0.80	0.23	0.25	1.15
1. Sentence reading (5 pts)	26	2.55	0.52	1.75	4.25
Pretest	26	5.47	0.97	3.50	8.20

Note. N: number of participants, SD: standard deviation, pts: puntos

Table 1 shows the results of the pretest, which is required to understand the students' initial proficiency in pronunciation. The overall mean scores across tasks were moderated, with the lowest performance level in the listening tasks dealing with the /s/ sound (M = 0.64, SD = 0.21) and the highest in sentence reading (M = 2.55, SD = 0.52). These small standard deviations in scores reflect a relatively homogeneous performance of the group. The overall mean pretest score was 5.47, SD = 0.97 out of a maximum of 10, which indicated that it was possible to achieve a substantial improvement, especially on tasks that focused on precise phonetic discrimination, such as listening to individual phonemes.

Table 2. Post-test. Descriptive measures for pronunciation skills

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
2. Listening: /ɪ/ & /i:/ (1.25 pts)	26	1.22	0.11	0.75	1.25
2. Listening: /s/ (1.25 pts)	26	1.23	0.07	1.00	1.25
2. Reading: /ɪ/ and /i:/ (1.25 pts)	26	1.12	0.17	0.65	1.25
2. Reading: /s/ (1.25 pts)	26	1.20	0.08	0.95	1.25
2. Sentence reading (5 pts)	26	4.27	0.57	2.75	5.00
Post-test	26	9.04	0.68	7.45	10.00

Note. N: Number of participants, SD: Standard Deviation

Table 2 shows that all the tasks were positively affected by the intervention, with all means in the post-test higher than in the pre-test, with sentence reading being the highest mean (M = 4.27, SD = 0.57). Participants also showed large gains in both the /ɪ/ & /i:/ and the /s/ listening tasks, coming close to perfect scores on the

tasks following the experimental training (M = 1.22 and M = 1.23, respectively). The mean post-test across the five categories was 9.04, SD = 0.68. This suggests general progress and shows the effectiveness of the analytic-linguistic approach to pronunciation. The results indicate that variance is considerably lower than in the pretest and that the amount of improvement is more uniform.

Overall, the results presented in Table 1 and Table 2 show an increase of mean score from 5.47 (SD = 0.97) in the pre-test to 9.04 (SD = 0.68) in the post-test. The sentence reading condition showed the largest effect with a mean gain of 1.72, especially in connected speech pronunciation. The largest gains also came for /s/ on the 'listening' tasks (0.64 to 1.23) and for /ɪ/ and /i:/ (0.76 to 1.22). The findings of both tables directly show the potential of targeted pronunciation training to lead to substantial learner improvement.

Table 3. Normality test Shapiro Wilk - Pretest/Post-test pronunciation skills

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	N	W	P
Pretest	26	0.95	0.18
Post-test	26	0.94	0.16

Note. N: number of participants, W: Shapiro Wilk Test, p: probability value

The Shapiro-Wilk test of normality is presented in Table 3. This test verified the normal distribution of pretest and post-test data, whose W values were 0.95 (p = 0.18) and 0.94 (p = 0.16), respectively. Thus, the parametric statistical test could be performed without violating any assumptions, allowing for the reliability of a subsequent paired T-test analysis. This finding confirms that any variation in scores can be identified as a result of an intervention and not as spurious pieces of the distribution.

Table 4. Statistical difference between pretest and post-test of pronunciation skills using Paired T-Test

			Statistics Difference	df	p
Pretest	Post-test	T de Student	-20.0	25.0	< .001

Note. df: degrees of freedom, p: probability value

Table 4 presents the results of the paired T-test, which was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference between the results of both tests. There is a statistically important difference between the pretest and posttest ($t = -20.0$, $p < 0.001$); thus, the intervention is effective. With a large negative t-value of -20.0, it is possible to see that the participants substantially improved their

pronunciation skills. The low p-value of less than 0.001 confirms that this result is independent of random assignments and is due to the systematic application of the analytic-linguistic treatment. These findings suggest that this type of training may be a viable option for use in classrooms.

4. Discussion

The first research question aimed to determine the level of English pronunciation among students before the implementation of the analytic-linguistic approach. The results showed that the students had a low-intermediate level and presented difficulties in all the evaluated tasks, especially in listening to words that contained the /s/ sound at the beginning. This revealed clear areas for improvement, which would be achieved by means of the intervention proposed.

The second research question sought to determine the students' English pronunciation after the implementation of the approach. In order to achieve this, the researcher applied an action research design that enabled the application of the analytic-linguistic approach during sessions to explicitly teach students pronunciation. According to the findings, the effects of the approach were positive and enhanced the students' proficiency, which supports previous research on phonetic training and articulatory instruction. Asrul and Husda (2022) and Sharma (2021) proved that phonetic training through devices like the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) is efficient in improving the articulation and auditory discrimination of the learners. Indeed, the activities implemented in this study, including phonetic transcription, articulatory descriptions, and minimal-pair practice, may have contributed to the improvements in the participants' recognition and pronunciation of /ɪ/ & /i:/ vowel sounds.

Another component of the intervention involved comparing English and Spanish pronunciation patterns, particularly consonant clusters beginning with /s/. Even though a very small number of students still struggled with these clusters, which suggests that particular differences of the learners, such as phonetic aptitude or L1-transferred fossilized errors, may need special attention, the results showed that the majority of participants substantially improved their recognition and articulation of English words beginning with /s/. After the instruction, they managed to recognize the accurate pronunciation of these words, as well as produce them without mistakenly adding an extra sound at the beginning. This seems to indicate that they understood the difference between the way certain English and Spanish cognates are produced. This instructional strategy is consistent with Quarto's (2022) research. In his study conducted in Chile, the author demonstrated how tackling problems concerning consonant clusters is very helpful in Spanish-speaking countries.

The improvement seen in the sentence-reading task might also show that students applied stress and intonation patterns well. Since this task asked participants to say sentences that included the stress and intonation features that were taught during the program, the better results suggest that learners started to understand how suprasegmental features help make speech easier to understand. These

results are in line with Couper's (2022) study, in which learners significantly gained perception and a more accurate production of word stress. Similarly, the studies by Zhang et al. (2021), Hafiza et al. (2024) and Dankanjanakpan and Sinwongsuwat (2025) showed that by receiving detailed explanations regarding intonation, participants were able to use it more efficiently. This backs up the idea that teaching stress and intonation directly can help students have control over spoken English to make their speech clearer.

Regarding the third research question, the comparison of the pre- and post-test results revealed that the participants had significantly improved their pronunciation after the intervention, indicating that the analytic-linguistic approach was indeed effective. This finding agreed with those from earlier studies. For instance, Mahmood (2023), Yakut (2020), Irawan and Tampubolon (2020), and Namaziandost et al. (2018) identified the positivity of explicit instruction on students whose pronunciation proficiency was initially low.

In spite of these gains, there are some limitations to the study: 5 weeks with two sessions per week may have been long enough to show the effects of a treatment but not long enough to state that improvement in pronunciation was learned and retained in the long-term memory. Another limitation is that the study was conducted in a controlled classroom and therefore may differ from other, more realistic educational contexts with larger classroom sizes and public schools. This suggests the need for further research on the adaptability of the methods.

In general, this study confirms that the analytic-linguistic approach can be successfully applied for pronunciation practice, and the findings of this present research also add to the existing literature, giving strong support for the approach. Future research could look at long-term effects of the accent-reducing instruction and whether the analytic intervention could be sustainable in other educational settings. Another option is to add a control group to the methodology in order to ease comparison of the analytic-linguistic method with other pronunciation instruction models to support the findings. Finally, such an extended treatment might also allow for deeper implementation of the techniques of this approach and better outcomes for pronunciation.

5. Conclusions

Results showed that the students' initial pronunciation proficiency was low, but it was enhanced in every way that was included in the study. When post-test results were obtained, it was easy to see that all of them were higher than those of the pre-test, a clear sign of success. Participants showed significant progress not only in the production and recognition of vowel sounds (/ɪ/ and /iː/), but also in consonant clusters beginning with /s/, as well as stress and intonation patterns.

Since the mean score increased from 5.47 in the pretest to 9.04 in the post-test, the effectiveness of the intervention can be proved. These positive results seem to suggest that explicit instruction through the analytic-linguistic approach can substantially improve students' pronunciation, both in terms of recognition and production.

However, there were multiple limitations to the study, including its small sample size and a five-week intervention timeframe, which could have been too brief to fully measure the long-term effects of the intervention. Moreover, the study carried out in a private institution made it difficult to generalize its findings to other institutions. In conclusion, although the study was only conducted in one private institution where controlled practice activities, phonetic transcription activities, and phonemic awareness activities with minimal pairs were performed, the study was interventional and gave learners more learning opportunities.

Further research could also examine the long-term effects of the analytic-linguistic approach on pronunciation retention, as well as involve larger samples of students from different educational contexts for greater generalizability of the findings of this study. Additionally, pronunciation instruction can be improved through the use of technology such as pronunciation software and mobile apps.

6. Authors' contribution

DM: Data collection, data analysis, discussion, results and conclusions
MT: Tutoring, final revision

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